1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

286 The weaving of cloth is, as has already been said, now almost extinct in Zongu; in Lingthem only a couple of women—the wives of Datoop and Jiroong—weave at all regularly. Lepcha cloths are extremely finely woven; nearly all are in striped patterns, sometimes over a plain, and sometimes over a patterned background. I have been shown such cloths further ornamented with needlework embroidery, but I did not see any so enhanced in Zongu. Although weaving is now almost a lost art, the spindle is considered the [562] typical feminine symbol, as the arrow is the masculine one; and in stories the heavy bar of the loom is the woman's chief weapon.

301 Although no attempt is made to add 'beauty' to the ordinary objects and surroundings of life, both men and women wear a certain amount of jewellery. The men wear turquoise ear-rings and rings, the women heavy and elaborate necklaces of big and usually unworked semi-precious stones, often with a charm-box of fretted gold or silver inlaid with turquoise and coral suspended from them, and also occasionally brooches and bracelets; but all these jewels [556] are bought ready-made. They are considered to enhance the beauty of the wearer; they are also a display of wealth and the only possible form of investment. Young people occasionally display a certain amount of coquetry in their dress, but the effect is usually unfortu- [515] nately marred for the stranger owing to the Lepchas' habit of not washing their bodies.

iv

342 Nowadays new houses are built very rarely. According to Chala Mandal—the head of the village of Lingthem, and also of the smaller village of Panung to the east with ten houses, and Lik-lyang (five houses) Salim and Safo (three houses each) on the other side of the Talung river—only four new houses have been built in the [592] present century. Ordinarily the members of a Lepcha household do not separate, but if the family gets too numerous, or if brothers, either real or classificatory, do not agree, the household will split and the land be divided and the younger brother will build a house of his own. Three of the four new houses—those of Ongden, Kurma and Nahyeun—were built for this reason. In the case of the fourth house—that of Katel—the situation was more complicated 342 and irregular. Katel, a man from a village on the far side of Zongu, 592 married a woman of Lingthem, an orphan who had been brought up in the Mandal's house, and took her home to his village. But

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

ceremonies may last anything from six hours to as many days—is thirsty work; and in the latter half of the services the officiants are seldom quite sober. These charges are never made openly or by one priest to another; in public they are quite amicable, though they usually affect to ignore the other's presence and performance.

The mythological justification for this amity between the two religions is that the patron spirits are husband and wife: the lamaist Tashey-*thing* is the husband, and the Mun (always a female spirit) the wife. For this reason, it is said, the lamas are stronger, and especially have more influence with the gods; the Mun on the other hand are perhaps more competent to deal with devils.

[562] This attitude towards husband and wife, in which the husband is considered automatically the more powerful, is in itself probably a Tibetan import. For the Mun spirit has also another husband in the Padem (or Bum-*thing*); this latter resembles the Mun save that only men are possessed by it; a Padem is far less powerful than a Mun, and for many men this possession is the first step towards becoming a Mun. In the case of this supernatural husband and wife it is explained that the Mun is the more powerful because she is the wife; and this is far more congruent with the specific Mun mythology in which the female supernaturals are almost always the most important.

It would require far more knowledge than is at present available to be able to state definitely of the Lepcha folk-lore what elements are indigenous, what borrowed from Tibet, and what from other neighbouring tribes. My impression is that by far the greater number of stories told in Zongu, though many have foreign accretions, are of domestic origin. I only heard specifically Tibetan-lamaist stories from pious lamas, and by no means always from them.

ii

It is said that lamaism was introduced into Sikkim in or near 1641, the date of accession of the first lamaist king Penchoo Namgyé. He is said to have been made king by three lamas of the Nyingma-pa or 'Red Hat' sect, the unreformed branch of lamaism; these three lamas were fugitives from Tibet, following the violent struggles between the Yellow Hats and Red Hats and possibly Chinese or Mongolian intervention.

I have not been able to find any conclusive evidence as to the date of the conversion of the Lepchas to lamaism, or of their admission

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER NINE

RELIGION III: THE PEOPLE OF MAYEL

i

I stated earlier that the Lepchas have two or perhaps three religions. My reason for this statement is that the ritual connected with harvesting and hunting, though performed by Mun, have a number of features which do not occur elsewhere. It seems to me possible that the worship of the people of Mayel, and perhaps of Pong *rum* the god of hunters, is of a different origin to the other Mun ceremonies; unfortunately too little is known about the ritual of neighbouring tribes to enable profitable speculation to be made as to whether either or both ceremonies are relatively modern importations from outside, or whether they are on the contrary the oldest Lepcha customs. The most outstanding differences with other Mun ritual, and indeed with ordinary Lepcha life, is, first, a discrimination against women, secondly, an insistance on virginity for some of the celebrants, and thirdly a suggestion of the danger of menstruating women. Women may perform the sacrifice to the people of Mayel, but if they do so the ceremony is curtailed and fewer objects employed; they not only cannot sacrifice to Pong *rum* but must not even be aware when the sacrifice takes place; and the popped corn and *chi* which are employed in it, if not made by a man, which is preferable, must be made by a virgin girl. The chief offerings to the people of Mayel are the *lafét* sacrifice and *sakyou faat*; the small bird for the *lafét* must be killed by a virgin boy, and the strained *chi* poured into the buttered cup by a virgin girl.

This insistance upon virginity is unparalleled in Lepcha life;[1]

[1] The only other instance is in the sacrifice to a pair of demons who cause a coughing disease (? tuberculosis) and whose presence and ritual were divined and by a Nandjému less than ten years ago. For this ceremony the popped corn must be made by a virgin girl, and the Mun must fast for twenty-four hours before the sacrifice. Only two people know how to perform this very modern importation.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

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would count as incestuous. Another reason is the cultural concept that there is no temperamental difference between men and women; except that men are usually stronger physically identical standards of behaviour are expected from both sexes; the standards of beauty are identical; except that they may not kill animals nor perform lamaist ceremonies nor own land women suffer under no disability because they are women. With this general conception of the similarity of the two sexes the differences of appearance and function of the primary sexual characteristics becomes even more striking and worthy of comment; and it is worth noting again in this context the extraordinary amount of fantasy about the independent life of the genitalia which occurs in the Lepcha stories. It is also possible that in removing all intense emotion from sexual activity the Lepchas have also destroyed some of the emotional release and psychological satisfaction.

Some of the young men were particularly given to obscenity, particularly Tobgé, a ne'er-do-well whose wife, it will be remembered, was carrying on with Dadool, and Chudo, Tafoor's younger brother. Chudo was twenty-nine, the father of three children, and very fond of his wife. He always gave the impression of being very much younger than his years; he was particularly sweet-tempered, even for a Lepcha, and very industrious, but he was extremely childish, perhaps because his elder brother, Tafoor, was so very learned and responsible. He had rather a grotesque sense of humour and was very fond of imitating lamaist dances, almost parodying them, and of making surprising jokes and unexpected little presents. When he learned I was fond of flowers he used to bring me nearly every day some orchid or other odd flower that he had found in his work travelling about the country-side. If the younger men were more inclined to obscenity so were the elder women, particularly Lumba's first wife, a Mun aged forty-seven, who was completely outrageous and shameless in her speech and behaviour; she was a jolly bawdy old creature, rather in the tradition of Marie Lloyd. As far as my information goes, and on such matters it is very extensive, she was relatively chaste in her private life; nobody repeated any scandal about her. When I talked to women about sex and childbirth and similar subjects the older ones used always to answer quite freely; but occasionally if there was a young woman in the group, she would ask why I talked about such things which made her feel ashamed; if this happened the older women would usually stop the conversation, giving

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

than they really are; they would be frightened of spoiling or losing them, though girls might try on the clothes and jewels of a friend for a moment just to see how they look. The only occasion on which clothes are borrowed is in the case of emergencies, for example if a person gets very wet far from his own home. Sometimes, it is said, a girl will dress up in men's clothes as a joke, but it would be considered rather shameful for a grown man to dress up as a woman, though young boys occasionally do so in play. One or two lamas told me that men were essentially superior to women, but I never heard similar opinions from a layman. Various details suggest that there is a sentiment of sex-rivalry, but it only seems to be openly formulated through contact with Nepali or Tibetans. In specifically Lepcha contexts this rivalry is unformulated and unstressed.

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viii

The ideal life of a Lepcha could be schematically represented by a slightly undulating curve, at first rising steeply, and then gradually flattening out, but still rising somewhat till the very end, when there is a tendency to drop again. The first years of life are a period of relative obscurity; a young child consumes more than he gives, and is therefore a weight on his parents and the community. Children are not on the whole harshly treated, but once they have achieved physical independence very little attention is paid to them. Grown-ups do not talk to or play with children; except when they are by themselves children are in the background to do simple chores and to be taught to equip themselves for adult life; they are a responsibility, not companions. There are no organised games for children, and no instruments which are intended to be children's toys; nor for that matter are there any games for adults. A few Lepchas know of the Nepali game of 'Cows and Tigers' (an elaborate form of the game of which the European 'Fox and Geese' is another representative) but they do not play it and do not understand why other people should do so.

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After about the age of ten a boy takes an increasing share in the productive work of the community and, as he grows up, is co-opted more and more into the communal life. There is no abrupt transition for the male between childhood and manhood; a youth takes on additional responsibility and work, and mingles more in the pastimes and discussions of his elders, according to his ability and private inclinations. Sexual experiment and adventure, marriage

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2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

But the settled areas of British India have an expensive British administration, for which, in the last instance, the peasant has to pay. This is not to deny, of course, that he gets certain benefits in return: good roads, schools, hospitals, and so on; but these are of more use to people who have already reached the higher economic levels. In the meantime the small tenant cultivator is forced to sell his own rice in order to pay his taxes, not to mention expensive litigation, which seems to increase steadily as conditions become ever more "settled." It seems all wrong to me.

* * * * *

Both men and women work in the fields, and there is no hard-and-fast division of labour between the sexes, although the heavier work is done mostly by men. Woman, as such, is an inferior being, but only because the Lamaist doctrine says so. "Even Buddhist nuns, excepting the very few so-called incarnations of celestial Bodhisats, are given an inferior position scarcely higher than lay devotees"; and to be born as a woman is a definite step backwards in the march towards Nirvana, the freedom from reincarnation, which is the goal of all true Buddhists. But this idea is completely foreign to the Lepcha, who does not recognise any inherent distinction between the temperament of the sexes; there is with them practically no such thing as "men's work" and "women's work."

Dr. Margaret Mead was the first to point out that the personalities of the two sexes are socially produced. Two of the tribes she studied in New Guinea had "no idea that men and women are different in temperament. They allow them different economic and religious rôles, different skills, different vulnerabilities to evil, magic and supernatural influences. The Arapesh believe that painting in colour is appropriate only to men, and the Mundugumor consider fishing an essentially feminine task. But any idea that temperamental traits of the order of dominance, bravery, aggressiveness, objectivity, malleability are inalienably

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

associated with one sex (as opposed to the other) is entirely lacking. This may seem strange to a civilisation which in its sociology, its medicine, its slang, its poetry, and its obscenity accepts the socially defined differences between the sexes as having an innate basis in temperament and explains any deviation from the socially determined rôle as abnormality of native endowment or early maturation. . . .

"The knowledge that the personalities of the two sexes are socially produced is congenial to every programme that looks forward to a planned order of society. It is a two-edged sword that can be used to hew a more flexible, more varied society than the human race has ever built, or merely to cut a narrow path down which one sex or both sexes will be forced to march, regimented, looking neither to the right nor to the left. It makes possible a Fascist programme of education in which women are forced back into a mould that modern Europe had fatuously believed to be broken for ever. It makes possible a Communist programme in which the two sexes are treated as nearly alike as their different physiological functions permit." (*Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, 1935.)

Everything we saw in Jongu bears ample witness to the correctness of her views; and such differences as there are between the sexes are undoubtedly culturally conditioned, no inherent variation in temperament between them being recognised. This will perhaps be more apparent when we come to the subject of marriage.

Although we did not collect actual statistics, it is my impression that the Lepcha woman does considerably more physical work than the man. In addition to working all day in the fields, she has to cook, tend the children, and keep the house in order, and is often out searching for fuel: but the man is not above nursing the baby or cooking his meal when necessary. But since so many of the men are Lamas, and in consequence required to spend a great deal of time in the performance of their useless duties, the bulk of the work falls to the women. This is not, however, to relegate them to the

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

This is not, however, to relegate them to the position of domestic slaves; and while the laws of the state do not permit a woman to inherit land, she can, and does, own other property, and is an equal partner with her husband in the management of the household affairs.

In addition to the cereal food they raise, all the Jongu Lepchas keep pigs and cattle, which they slaughter from time to time. No attempt is made to breed from the best stock; nor is a bull ever taken to a cow, who "chooses her own husband," as Tafoor naïvely put it. All pigs are castrated when they are three months old, as they are considered to get savage after this age. Incidentally, it may be noted that the eating of uncastrated pig's flesh is believed to cause a man to become homosexual, a perversion which is practically unknown amongst Lepchas and regarded with disgust. There was only one known case in Lingtem, both parties being now old men with grown-up families. There is, as a matter of fact, no word in the Lepcha language for homosexuality, a man who practises it being called merely "one who has eaten uncastrated pig." This prohibition does not apply to women, and is ineffective outside the Lepcha tribe, Tibetans and Nepalese, for instance, being unaffected if they eat this flesh. Nor does it apply to the eating of wild boars, a particular delicacy which the Lepcha does not often obtain.

All domestic animals are regularly fed, and during monastery festivals I several times noticed men and women take a few scraps and give them to the stray dogs which hung around the place. The house-dog is kindly treated and, like all the other domestic animals, given a name. Pigs, chickens, and dogs are generally given the dregs of the fermented millet after it has been used for making *chi*, as a result of which the former are said sometimes to become inebriated, but I must confess that I have not myself seen a drunken pig. They also feed on human excrement, and may often be seen following people out to the fields for this purpose.

Sheep are not kept in Jongu, as the climate is thought to be too hot; but actually the dense forest would make grazing difficult. Nor does one ever see a horse or a mule, two

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

of the fontanel, and remains on the baby's head until it wears away. At the same time snail-shells, as already described, are tied round its neck and wrists and sometimes fastened to its clothing.

There is also a ceremony on the third day after birth, which is called *Pa-Gong Chi-tong*, the latter part of which word means merely *chi*-drinking—an indispensable part of all Lepcha ceremonies.

Very early in the morning, before any of the guests arrive, the floor is swept with wormwood and a little incense is burned. At the same time a Mun will come and wave offerings over the mother, should she have required his (or her) services on account of a difficult delivery; but if the birth was normal this office is omitted. The Mun takes a previously boiled chicken, divides it, and sets it on a tray, together with parched rice, ginger, and some pieces of wild birds' flesh. There is also the usual buttered cup for libations of *chi*, and the whole is offered to the god of birth. In the meantime most of the guests will have arrived, and the offering is now divided amongst them.

If the child is a boy, and particularly in the case of a first-born, an ox, pig, or goat will be sacrificed. In the case of a girl an animal is not generally slaughtered; but if the family is well-off it is usual to buy some meat and give each of the guests a piece, for true Lepcha hospitality demands that no guest should leave without a present of some sort. Whenever we went to a Lepcha house we were invariably given something to take away. On the occasion of big ceremonies it was usually a portion of the sacrificial meat; but even when we went on an ordinary friendly visit we were always given eggs, milk, or grain.

In the case of a boy each guest brings one rupee and a ceremonial scarf of butter muslin; but for a girl the usual present is six annas or a chicken. The scarf is not given for girls.

Only very rich people will go to the expense of sacrificing an animal for a baby girl, and when the Mun offers it to

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

852 [554] 562 [824] the birth-god he will entreat it to send a boy next time. He will concentrate on this matter throughout the third night. He takes three tufts of elephant grass tied up with coloured thread, and attaches them to ordinary finger-rings. He then waves this bunch of grass slowly over the parents of the newly-born child, and afterwards over all present.

852 562 773 Now in Azoom Aru Purtam, a place through which all babies must pass before being born, there is a waterfall called *Lung Fing* and a well called *Rungzel Oonglop*. The waterfall is a boy and the well is a girl. When he concentrates on the matter the Mun is able to visit this place in spirit, when he persuades the god to make the waterfall and the well change places.

The coloured threads with which the elephant grass is tied are offered to the spirit of the waterfall, after which the grass is put in a pot of water and kept on the household altar. A chicken is now offered to Nazong Nyu, the progenitor of the human race, after which the two rings are given to the child's mother to wear. The performance of this ceremony, for which there does not appear to be any specific name, will assure that the next child born is a boy.

852 [787] 553 If a Lama is present on the third day he will work out the child's horoscope and give it a name; otherwise the child's father will go to his house. It may be noted, however, that the names given by Lamas are never used and in many cases are forgotten. Someone present will usually give the child a nickname, which will be selected in accordance with its appearance. Common names of this sort are "the fair one"; "the dark one," and so on; but the most extraordinary one I ever came across was *Kalok Tikung*, which being translated comes to mean "The rat's grandfather." Children are 551 generally called by these nicknames; but otherwise the custom of teknonymy is usual. An adult may occasionally be called by his name, but it is not considered polite to do so, and in no circumstances may a Lama's real name be mentioned. There does not appear to be any objection to

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mentioning the names of the dead; nor does a woman mind 551
giving the name of her husband; but she will, of course, say
only the nickname.

While someone is selecting a nickname for the baby, one 852
of its aunts (it makes no difference which) ties red and white 553
threads round its wrists. All this time the baby will be lying
in its mother's lap in the kitchen, and it is never taken near
the Mun who is doing the ceremony. It must be kept awake,
however, and as soon as the ceremony is over will sleep
soundly. But before this its mother will feed it with a little
butter, to which she may add the merest trace of powdered
rice. On this occasion a necklace will usually be put round
the baby's neck by its mother, but this is removed as soon as
the ceremony is over and not put on again until such time
as the child can crawl; otherwise it is thought that the baby
will not take the breast properly.

With the exception of people actually living in the house 846
no one may see a newly-born baby until the morning of the
third day after its birth. People do not make any remark
on first beholding the child; nor are they expected to con-
gratulate its parents. There is, however, no harm in remark-
ing upon its likeness to either of its parents. The usual
insincere platitudes such as are commonly uttered by us on
these occasions are, however, not expected, and it is con-
sidered perfectly polite to behold the infant in stony silence.
It seems to me an excellent custom.

A mother does not usually leave the house for the three
days following the birth of her child, but after this she may,
if strong enough, start going out again. She usually resumes
her ordinary housework on the fourth day and the heavier
field work on the seventh. For some weeks after the birth
the mother is given extra food, which usually takes the form
of chicken soup. This in itself sounds a very little thing; 846
but to anyone who has been accustomed to dealing with 562
the more primitive Hindu peoples of India (and perhaps
also the Mohammedans, but I have no experience of them)
it is a refreshing change to find a mother treated with

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consideration instead of being looked upon as an outcast, and a source of defilement to others.

It is usual for everybody living in a house where a birth has recently taken place to wash themselves and their clothes, first in hot water inside the house, and afterwards in the nearest stream. The mother generally continues to wash every three days for the first month following the child's birth, and the baby itself is said to be washed each night and morning for a month. This, however, I think is merely a counsel of perfection and not often observed. I should add that there is amongst the Lepchas no idea of ceremonial uncleanliness, either at this or at any other time; nor have they the common obsession with defecation, which leads Indians to look upon the left hand (with which the body is always cleaned) as itself an unclean thing.

During the third-day celebrations the mother will usually wear new or at least freshly-washed clothes. The baby itself will be wrapped in a cloth, the colour of which should be in accordance with its birth-signs. Thus, if it has been ascertained that the child will become a Lama, for instance, it will be wrapped in a yellow cloth; if a hunter, then in red; if a woman of loose morals, lilac; and so on.

As soon as a woman becomes pregnant both she and her husband must take certain precautions, the neglect of which is thought to cause, amongst other things, difficult delivery. During the fifth month of pregnancy it is usual to call in a Mun, who will wave elephant grass over the mother and thus ensure an easy birth.

During the whole time of pregnancy and up to the third day after the birth of the child both the father and mother, should they be making garden fences, must work unassisted. Failure to observe this precaution will cause a difficult delivery.

The father must not take fish out of a trap, or the child will be born with its nose stopped up. Nor must he lock anything up, with the exception of his own private box, or the child will refuse to descend from the womb until such

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
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114 831 [562] circle, but either alternative seems possible."[110] And Gorer himself writes: "The Lepchas are much occupied with sex; it is the subject to much of their conversation and nearly all their humour; it is regarded as almost as essential as food. Sex is intended to be almost exclusively sensual and almost impersonal; the culture makes no allowance for deep personal relationships passionately adhered to between sexual partners."[111]

In the first place we maintain that the sex instinct, the instinct that prompts a man to propagate his own kind, is a very strong one, natural to all peoples, and the Rong are no exceptions. It cannot be said of them that they are passionate in an extreme manner. The relationship that exists between male and female among all Asiatic peoples is different from that which prevails among the Europeans. The same is true of man and wife within the bond of marriage. The Lepchas are in no way alien to the general Asiatic picture. The method Gorer adopts to demonstrate his theory is wrong. He puts together the love affairs of a few individual Lepchas and with one unwarranted generalization he regards it as the average sexual standard of all Lepchas. Anyone could draw a similar picture of every nationality in the world if one would collect the "Chronique scandaleuse" of separate individuals and present it under the title "Sex Life of the Nation."[111a]

881 831 114 562 Gorer moreover states that the Lepchas believe or pretend to believe that puberty of girls, the development of breasts and menstruation occur only through sexual relationship with a man or a supernatural creature, the Kandu Mung, who is supposed to appear to the girl in order to make her sexually mature. This, of course, would very rarely occur. Most girls about nine or ten years of age would have to be raped. It would appear that the men invented this story to make the women dependent on them, particularly if the female desired puberty to come on. This belief of Gorer however we could not ascertain in the very places where Gorer carried out his research. All the same we were able to check on it

110. op. cit. p. 27.
111. op. cit. p. 332.
111a. G. S. Ghurye, Sexual Behaviour of the American Female, Sociological Bulletin, Bombay 1954, Vol. III, No. 2, p. 188 sq.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
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in other places. The Rong women are not so simple as to be taken in by such a man-made legend. They, on the contrary, affirm that the sexual maturity of girls and the development of the secondary sex characteristics occur without sexual relationship with man. The only difference is that the breasts of the girl who had had sexual relationship with man would produce some milk. The Maharaja of Sikkim and other educated Sikkimese, who read Gorer's book, found his description to be a defamation of the Lepcha character.

The Lepchas are the descendants of the first brother Lepcha, as reported above. They fall into three divisions, which are named after the districts in which they live. The Ilame Lepchas live in the Ilame district of Nepal; the Dandjung Lepchas on the other side of the Tista river in Sikkim; the Dam-sang Lepchas in Indian Sikkim and Bhutan. The second brother was called God-she, and is the father of the Jimdar tribe. The third was Meche, and he is the protoparent of the Meche. Each of these three have a different language.[112]

B. Sikkim Yak-tamba

There is in Sikkim a class of people who are called Limbu by the Nepalese and Tzong-pa by the Tibetans. They call themselves Yak-tamba, Ek-tamba and Ek-tambu. Tradition has it that, after the Lepchas, they are the oldest inhabitants of the place having settled there before the Tibetans and the Nepalese came to settle in the land. They are intermixed with the Rong in a very remarkable manner. At the present time they inhabit the land to the west as far as the river Arun as we have already pointed out before. They are regarded as divisions of the Limbu and bear a very close resemblance to them. The Yak-tamba have flatter faces and more Mongoloid features than the Lepchas.

C. The Bhodja of Sikkim

The Tibetans who migrated into Sikkim are called the Sikkim Bhodja. Legend links the Tibetan Je-khye-bu-

112. cfr. the report of the Rai given above concerning the first parents and their three sons; see p. 7, 38. Here we have the same content of the myth.

[pp. 110 – 159 not processed]